3 The Temporality of Aesthetic Vision

3.1 Modernist temporalities of the view

Yet what composed the present moment? If you are young, the future lies upon the present, like a piece of glass, making it tremble and quiver. If you are old, the past lies upon the present, like a thick glass, making it waver, distorting it. All the same, everybody believes that the present is something, seeks out the different elements in this situation in order to compose the truth of it, the whole of it. To begin with: it is largely composed of visual and of sense impressions (CE II, 293).

The passage from “The Moment: Summer’s Night” investigates into the quality of the moment and focuses on sense impressions as its distinctive components. The present it describes does not merely refer to an objective reality of things simply being there at a certain point of time, but it appears within a wider scope of individual interpretations that defer closure. The experience of time is conveyed through visual perceptions depending on different points in individual lives. The juxtaposition of two perspectives on the present moment introduces the principles of anachronism and anticipation, which determine the subjective perception of temporality, and the narrative structure of time. They render a notion of the present that resists representation and, at the same time, describe a way in which the text creates its own temporality through sense perceptions. “The Moment: Summer’s Night” is an experiment of the imagination in creating a momentary vision of a moment in time, which is almost infinitely expandable by being infinitely divisible.

Modernist texts combine the experience of temporality with visual perception. The category of temporality is not only central to Modernity, but it also presents Modernity’s central paradox: Modernist texts stand within a temporal continuum, and yet bring forth distinct kinds of temporality. This chapter analyses the temporality of aesthetic vision in Woolf’s works with regard to its inherent dialectical dynamics between the revelatory stasis of a moment of being and the procedural condition of becoming inscribed into the temporal flow of the narration. The productive tension that governs the narrative lies in its twofold movement between contraction and expansion in which aesthetic vision emerges as a textual strategy to bring forth a distinct kind of temporality, one which both explores the singularity of the moment and provides a synthetic view of more than one level of time.

The notion of the present moment has preoccupied both the sciences and aesthetic theory of the early twentieth century, and formed part of a general interest
Woolf’s contemporaries such as John McTaggart, or Bertrand Russell treated temporality from an idealist or an empiricist perspective respectively. In his essay “On the experience of time” Russell, similar to Woolf’s narrator in “The Moment: Summer’s Night”, is trying to define what is meant by “one (momentary) total experience”. He bases his investigation on the hypothesis that “4. An entity is said to be now if it is simultaneous with what is present to me, i.e. with this, where ‘this’ is the proper name of an object of sensation of which I am aware. 5. The present time may be defined as a class of all entities that are now”. 3

Although Woolf shares Russell’s idea about the subjectivity of temporal experience, and his impetus to find out what a “momentary total experience” might consist of, her conception of temporality created in narrative does not find its referent in the solely empirical perception of the present, but rather in the creation of a present which is absent, which constitutes an imaginary object without objectivity. Woolf’s texts regard the present not as a given category that determines sense perception, but as a discursive creation of aesthetic vision that emerges in the narrative structures of the text.

Philosophical theories of time have brought forth models of temporality which can be integrated into an overall aesthetic concern. From the late 19th century onwards, two main tendencies can be identified: One tendency emerging in philosophical theories on time is concerned with procedural models of time, which rely on ontological and phenomenological conceptions. Whereas Martin Heidegger regards time in terms of a hermeneutical analysis of existence, and as an event of being, 4 Edmund Husserl treats time in terms of a continuity of consciousness. 5 Henri Bergson emphasises temporality as memory of the body, 6 and Hans Blumenberg focuses on the distinction between individual life-time and what he calls “time of the world” (Weltzeit).7 The second model of temporality, which gained particular importance, lays emphasis on the moment as a singular
event stepping out of temporal continuity.⁸ The focus on the discontinuity of the experience of the singular moment therefore subverts the validity of those historical models of time, which are exclusively based on a teleological and linear construction.⁹ Hans-Robert Jauss considers the breaking of a linear time structure as characteristic of Modernist fiction, paradigmatically represented in Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Thomas Mann’s *Der Zauberberg*, and Marcel Proust’s *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*.¹⁰ Herbert Grabes describes the paradoxical impetus of writing within time, and yet against time as a characteristic feature of Modernist texts and as a means of undermining the chronological and irreversible succession of linear time dominant in 19th century literature.¹¹

In looking at the elusive nature of the moment, Modernist approaches intertwine the notion of time with aesthetic vision. In his influential definition of the “image” as a complex which takes place within time, and yet exceeds time, Ezra Pound provides a nexus between temporality and the image:

An ‘image’ is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. I use the term ‘complex’ rather in the technical sense employed by the newer psychologists, such as Hart, though we might not agree absolutely in our application. It is the presentation of such a ‘complex’ instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art.¹²

In Pound’s definition, the image is not to be separated from understanding or emotion, and reflects back on experience, enlarges and intensifies it. It creates

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aesthetic experience in an instant of time and reveals the potential of art to overcome time and space. The transformational, liberating and even redemptive potential of the image emerging in its unique and paradoxical temporality is described in similar terms by Walter Benjamin. The idea of condensation implied in Pound’s “complex” is paralleled by Benjamin’s term “constellation” in his definition of the dialectical image:

It’s not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill. ...Only dialectical images are genuine images.13

In forging an arbitrary relation between what has been and what is now, dialectical images defamiliarise the observer from what is factual, and transport him into a new critical awareness. The dialectical image also reveals itself as a visible means for the present to redeem the past from being obscured and forgotten, and, for Benjamin, it is the only form to provide, rather than replicate, genuine historical experience.14 In aesthetic theories focusing on the moment, in the aftermath of Benjamin, the notion of the present hinges on the underlying assumption of a redemptive presence, which creates a time out of time and promises release from what was conceived as bourgeois historical reality.

The sense of liberation from linear and historical time in moments of an aesthetic temporality created by the work of art is an essential concern of Proust’s À la Recherche du Temps Perdu. Woolf was familiar with the Recherche15 and Proust’s general popularity in Bloomsbury culminated in the publication of Clive Bell’s monograph in 1928.16 Proust’s influential notion of involuntary memory describes a sudden emergence of a memory that momentarily brings about the a-temporal recognition of a link between past and present:

15 Cheryl Mares, “Woolf’s Reading Proust”, Reading Proust Now, ed. by Mary Ann Caws and Eugène Nicole (Frankfurt am Main, New York, et al.: Lang, 1990), 185–186.
16 Brenda Silver, Virginia Woolf’s Reading Notebooks, Guermantes, 87; Swann’s Way, 82, 89. Bell focuses on the centrality of time and calls the Recherche “a shape in time” (Proust, 48): “Time is the stuff of which A la recherche du temps perdu is composed: the characters exist in time, and were the sense of time abstracted would cease to exist. In time they develop their relations, colour and extension all are temporal” (Proust, 45).
Involuntary memory provides an unexpected (shocking) link or association between a concrete experience in the present and its cognate in the past; as a sudden shock, the mémoire involontaire provides Proust with not a mere convolution, but a positive deliverance from temporality. [...] involuntary memory is, as Proust himself describes it, precisely the apprehension of “a fragment of time in the pure state” for “a moment brief as a flash of lightning” (Remembrance 3: 905).

The element of suddenness pertaining to the moment in which a memory gains presence in the “flash of lightning” is related to the pervasive notion of shock in Modernist accounts of aesthetic method and production. Clive Bell describes and explains Proust’s use of memory and his technique of relating present and past in the Recherche:

*A la recherche du temps perdu* is a series of carefully planned explosions by means of which the submerged past is brought into the present, the deep-sea monster of memory to the surface.

Could we but recapture a past experience, dragging it up from the depths of the subconscious, a past experience with all its glamour, its intensity, its reality clinging about it, but with its sting drawn, should we not stand a chance of seeing the monster whole and seeing him steadily. The monster we know can be brought to the surface by an appropriate shock. Proust’s first gift, the gift that conditioned his method, was his capacity for giving himself shocks.

In her autobiographical reflection *A Sketch of the Past*, Woolf likewise observes the element of unpredictability, suddenness and even shock which pervade her reflections on writing: “Then, for no reason that I know about, there was a sudden violent shock; something happened so violently that I have remembered it all my life. [...] These are three instances of exceptional moments. I often tell them over, or rather they come to the surface unexpectedly” (*MB*, 71).

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19 Ibid., 44.
20 Benjamin reads Proust in a similar way, but invests the *Recherche* with the hope of redemption: “Proust emerges as a model for the tactics of an awakening, insightful remembrance of the truth of life – or of a historical epoch – through the collection and manipulation of concrete remembered objects and impressions”. Pensky, “Tactics of Remembrance”, 168.
Benjamin, Woolf acknowledges the productive potential brought about by the insightful shock, when she assumes “that the shock-receiving capacity is what makes [her] a writer” (MB, 72).

The creative shock does not only provide insights into a different quality of reality constituted by the bringing to light of significant patterns, but also marks the starting point of artistic production. Likewise, some of today’s central theories of aesthetic experience propose a model of presence and treat it in an a-temporal sense. Vision plays a critical role in the unfolding theories of presence, and Karl Heinz Bohrer links the notion of presence to the moment of insight in order to define the concentration on the present as a prerequisite for aesthetic perception. Bohrer regards the experience of an absolute present as characteristic of Modern literature and bases his argument on the hypothesis that perception is fundamentally subjective. Bohrer uses the term ‘suddenness’ to refer to this specifically Modernist experience of time, and his theory of aesthetic experience centres on the autonomy of the aesthetic, which stands in opposition to history. This approach towards an unmediated kind of presence is not entirely unproblematic because it implies an aesthetics which seems to be able to do without the dialectical distance between the work of art and the reader.


23 The notion of time as becoming an increasingly subjective category in Modernism is likewise maintained by the sociological outline of Norbert Elias and the critical investigation into Modernism by Jürgen Habermas. Elias adumbrates the historical development of the notion of time as the product of an act of subjective synthesis. Norbert Elias, _Über die Zeit_ (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990), 1; XVII-XVIII. Jürgen Habermas, “Das Zeitbewußtsein der Moderne und ihr Bedürfnis nach Selbstvergewisserung”, _Der Philosophische Diskurs der Moderne. Zwölf Vorlesungen_ (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), 18.


Containing an element of absence in the process of reception, temporality rather allows for the interplay between difference and identity which exists between the past of the text and the present of the experience of reading.26

This chapter regards the temporality of aesthetic vision both as a quality of the text, and as a generative principle created in the act of reading.27 The first part will analyse the rhetoric of beginnings in which Woolf’s texts stage their own anteriority as in *A Sketch of the Past* where the sketch and the scene present minimalist forms in which vision is linked to temporality.

The second part is concerned with the notion of spatio-temporal constructions of aesthetic vision in anachronistic narrative movements of remembrance, recollection and retrieval within the central interplay of presence and absence. Whereas the trajectory of the narrative creates continuity, the element of stasis is presented in spatial and scenic constellations, which allow for a vision of time in space. In looking at the correlation of inner and outer spaces, rooms and containers of memory, this chapter investigates aesthetic vision between the localisation and the diffusion of a spatio-temporal order.

The third part focuses on *Between the Acts*, and its creation of paradox temporality in dialectical configurations between historical time and lifetime, between different generations, and between notions of immanent time and timelessness. It returns to the elements of the sketch, the scene, and the interlude as formal

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27 The significance of time in Woolf’s novels has been pointed out in numerous works, and although scholarship has habitually recognised the influence of philosophical models of time on her works, there are no systematic analyses of the conception of time in Woolf’s œuvre to date. Whereas early Woolf-scholarship from the 1930s until the 1950s was interested in time as a theme and motif (Church, 1955; Hartley, 1939; Kohler, 1948; Wilson, 1942; Graham, 1948), studies of the 1950s and 1960s mainly focused on the analyses of the momentariness of time (Baldanza, 1956; Beja, 1964; Fracis, 1960). This tendency was also prolonged in German Woolf-scholarship until the 1980s (Erzgräber, 1984), in which aesthetic questions remained largely neglected. Instead, the readily invoked assumption of Bergson’s influence had not only become a commonplace but was also boldly undermined by any non-Bergsonian approaches (Kumar, 1962). From the 1970s until the 1990s Woolf-scholarship concentrated on a number of diverging approaches, which focused on feminism, fine art and postcolonialism, in which temporality was conspicuously referred to the background. More recently, Vera Nünning and Theresa Prudente have drawn critical attention to the innovatory potential inherent in Woolf’s novels when it comes to presenting a-linear models of time that modify conceptions of time established in 19th century fiction (V. Nünning, 2002, 307; Prudente, 2009).
prerequisites for aesthetic vision, and treats them as signatures of a distinct temporality.

3.2 Beginnings: the sketch and the scene

In an entry into her diary on May 28th, 1929, Virginia Woolf reflects on the difficulty of starting to write the novel then still called *The Moths*:

How am I to begin it? And what is it to be? I feel no great impulse; no fever; only a great pressure of difficulty. Why write it then? Why write at all? Every morning I write a little sketch, to amuse myself. [...] I am not saying [...] that these sketches have any relevance. I am not trying to tell a story. Yet perhaps it might be done in that way. A mind thinking. They might be islands of light – islands in the stream that I am trying to convey: life itself going on (D III, 229).

What she called the sketch, a possible “island of light” in the stream of life, becomes an integral part of her aesthetics. The metaphors of the island and the stream illustrate the temporal dynamics of the narrative between continuous motion and temporary stasis. The inherently incomplete and seemingly random sketches referred to in this passage resemble the short-lived intensity of the “moments of being” described in Woolf’s own memoir *A Sketch of the Past*.

In *A Sketch of the Past*, Woolf’s aesthetic reflections upon temporality are treated within the twofold perspective of present and past, of presence and absence, and of the visible versus the invisible. While she was writing *A Sketch of the Past*, Woolf was deeply and at times distressfully immersed in working on the biography of Roger Fry: “As it happens that I am sick of writing Roger’s life, perhaps I will spend two or three mornings making a sketch” (*MB*, 64). “Making a sketch” temporarily relieves her from the discursive pressures of encyclopedic completeness and descriptive fidelity to fact exerted by the genre of biography.28 In its contingency, its playful randomness and resistance to linearity, the *Sketch*, an epithet referring both to its concept and form, reveals many dimensions relevant to Woolf’s aesthetics of vision. It is above all the very sense of ostentatious incompleteness inherent in the notion of the sketch which becomes a particular

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28 Woolf expresses her exasperation with Fry’s biography: “I have no energy at the moment to spend upon the horrid labour that it needs to make an orderly and expressed work of art; where one thing follows another and all are swept into a whole” (*MB*, 75). Elizabeth Hirsh, “Writing as Spatial Historiography”, *Mapping the Self: Space, Identity, Discourse in British Auto/Biography*, ed. by Frédéric Regard (Saint-Etienne: Publications de l’Université de Saint-Etienne, 2003), 211.
strength of Virginia Woolf’s fiction. Her works are fraught with the sense of openness and the unfinished. In *Jacob’s Room*, which critics at first have dismissed as a “crowded little album of pictures”, the artist Charles Steele is exasperated by the seemingly impossible task of painting Mrs. Flanders and gives up painting her picture altogether (*JR*, 6). In *The Voyage Out*, Terence Hewet does not write the novel about silence that he intends to write, and the biography of the grandfather in *Night and Day* remains a fragment. In *To the Lighthouse*, Mr. Ramsay never completes the “Alphabet of Truth”, and not until the very end of the novel does Lily Briscoe finish her painting.

The sketch anticipates the finished work yet acquires an aesthetic presence on its own that is founded on perceptual difference and temporal deferral. Woolf’s fiction privileges moments of openness and invention. It focuses on the minimalist, the seemingly banal and quotidian, and implies that what is conventionally beneath notice is often in fact most noticeable. Instead of looking for the grand design, Lily Briscoe and the children in *To the Lighthouse* are able to perceive the whole in single, fragmented recognitions and fleeting memories: “The great revelation had never come. The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark; here was one. This, that and the other” (*TL*, 161). The sketch carries this notion of illumination, enlightenment and even revelation, and becomes an analogue to images like “islands of light”, “matches struck in the dark”, or “the match burning in a crocus” (*MD*, 35) that Woolf uses to characterise her idea of the moment.

Woolf includes the notion of the sketch in her poetic reflections and expresses the desire to develop a new way of writing which both preserves the unfinished nature of the sketch, and also displays the precision of the complete work:

> I wish I cd invent a new critical method – something swifter & lighter & more colloquial & yet intense: more to the point & less composed; more fluid & following the flight, than my C.R. essays. The old problem: how to keep the flight of the mind, yet be exact. All the difference between the sketch & the finished work (*DV*, 298 [sic]).

*A Sketch of the Past* can be regarded as an experiment in which fiction records its own processes of rendering the past and analyses them at the same time.

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Departing from set conventions, Woolf’s biographical fiction and her criticism of the traditional conception of biography rather investigate the peripheries of real and imagined lives, and her skepticism about established criteria of biographical writing gives way to new and experimental forms of creating character in biography and memoir.32 A Sketch of the Past invokes the analogy to the painter’s sketch, and hence extends the generic boundaries of biography. She conceives of the biographer as artist and of the artist as biographer when, in her essay on Walter Sickert, she speaks of him as “a great biographer, [...] when he paints a portrait I read a life”.33 In works like A Sketch of the Past Woolf develops a notion of temporality that relies on minimal formal units such as the sketch, the scene, and the interlude. Time and vision interact, when, for instance, in A Sketch of the Past, Woolf compares vision to memory, and reflects on how something that is seen in the past can gain presence and momentarily dissolve the link between presence and reality:

The strength of these pictures – but sight was always then so much mixed with sound that picture is not the right word – the strength anyhow of these impressions makes me again digress. Those moments – in the nursery, on the road to the beach – can still be more real than the present moment [...]. But I was seeing them through the sight I saw here – the nursery and the road to the beach. At times I can go back to St Ives more completely than I can this morning. I can reach a state where I seem to be watching things happen as if I were there. That is, I suppose, that my memory supplies what I had forgotten, so that it seems as if it were happening independently, though I am really making it happen. In certain favourable moods, memories – what one has forgotten – come to the top. Now if this is so, is it not possible – I often wonder – that things we have felt with great intensity have an existence independent of our minds; are in fact still in existence? And if so, will it not be possible, in time, that some device will be invented by which we can tap them? I see it – the past – as an avenue lying behind; a long ribbon of scenes, emotions (MB, 67).

In A Sketch of the Past, Woolf expresses her desire to tap the reservoir of the unseen and forgotten in its continuity outside the reach of the subject’s consciousness, to rescue the moment of aesthetically self-conscious being from non-being and oblivion, and to momentarily preserve it in narrative images that appear in the mode of an “as if”.

In tracing her own method of rendering the past in which she asserts the productive and independent activity of the mind to create, Woolf identifies the scene

32 Woolf herself was an avid reader of memoirs, and one of her earliest ventures into the genre of biography, “Reminiscences” (1907), was intended as a biography of her sister Vanessa and addressed to her children.
33 Virginia Woolf, Walter Sickert: A Conversation, 10.
as the core from which her rendition of the past, and perhaps also her narrative
evolve, and relates it to “the origin of her writing impulse”:

These scenes, by the way, are not altogether a literary device – a means of summing up
and making innumerable details visible in one concrete picture. Details there were; still,
if I stopped to think, I could collect a number. But, whatever the reason may be, I find
that scene making is my natural way of marking the past. Always a scene has arranged
itself: representative; enduring. This confirms me in my instinctive notion: (it will not bear
arguing about; it is irrational) the sensation that we are sealed vessels afloat on what it is
convenient to call reality; and at some moments, the sealing matter cracks; in floods reality;
that is, these scenes – for why do they survive undamaged year after year unless they are
made of something comparatively permanent? Is this liability to scenes the origin of my
writing impulse? Are other people also scene makers? These are questions to which I have
no answer. Perhaps sometime I will consider it more carefully. Obviously I have developed
the faculty, because, in all the writing I have done, I have almost always had to make a
scene, either when I am writing about a person; I must find a representative scene in their
lives; or when I am writing about a book, I must find their poem, novel...But this may not be
the same faculty (MB, 122).34

Woolf’s synecdochal conception of the scene and her reflection upon the acts
of scene-receiving and scene-making describe them as pre-discursive fusions
between the reality of a scene and the invisible and “sealed” part of one’s identity.
In her essay “The Russian Point of View”, Woolf calls the invisible content of the
sealed vessels “the soul”: “Whoever you are, you are the vessel of this perplexed
liquid, this cloudy, yeasty, precious stuff, the soul. The soul is not restrained by
barriers. It overflows, it floods, it mingles with the souls of others” (CR, 180).

The underlying idea of the vanishing point of an imaginative synthesis
between souls is further explored in Woolf’s reading of Dostoevsky, where she
finds a model for expressing the emergence of a new amalgamation of elements
of the soul. In a trajectory obliterating conventional temporality, the soul in Dos-
toevsky becomes indistinguishable from the souls of others and creates a new
paradigm for the presentation of the human mind, which exceeds the singularity
of scenes:

The pace at which we are living is so tremendous that sparks must rush off our wheels as we
fly. Moreover, when the speed is thus increased and the elements of the soul are seen, not
separately in scenes of humour or scenes of passion as our slower English minds conceive
them, but streaked, involved, inextricably confused, a new panorama of the human mind is
revealed. The old divisions melt into each other (CR, 179).

34 The typescript of this passage reads threads instead of details, and less skeptically closes:
“Or is this not quite the same faculty?” Virginia Woolf, A Sketch of the Past, Typescript I, BL ADD.
MS. 61973, 120–121.
In *A Sketch of the Past*, Woolf renders the dialectic constellation between surface and depth in the metaphors of the river and the film to describe the interdependence, and mutual pervasiveness of present and past vision:

The past only comes back when the present runs so smoothly that it is like the sliding surface of a deep river. Then one sees through the surface to the depths. In those moments I find one of my greatest satisfactions, not that I am thinking of the past; but that it is then that I am living most fully in the present. For the present when backed by the past is a thousand times deeper than the present when it presses so close that you can feel nothing else, when the film on the camera reaches only the eye (*MB*, 98).

Images, emotions and impressions of the past evoked by memory assert a reality of their own and question any exclusive ontological claim of the present towards representing an absolute given reality. Linked to the past, the present gains temporal significance and semantic depth, and allows for the experience of difference.35 The view of the present sustained by the past brings forth a momentarily synthetic vision of past and present, which exceeds the sensation of the merely visible surface of experience, and shifts between the present actualisation of an impression and its temporal distancing into the past. In an entry into her diary, Woolf acknowledges this capacity of voluntary memory to shape the past:

At the moment (I have 7 ½ before dinner) I can only note that the past is beautiful because one never realizes an emotion at the time. It expands later, & thus we don't have complete emotions about the present, only about the past. This struck me on Reading platform, watching Nessa & Quentin kiss, he coming up shyly, yet with some emotion. This I shall remember; & make more of, when separated from all the business of crossing the platform, finding our bus &c. That is why we dwell on the past, I think (*D* III, 5).

This passage from her diary, in itself a transitory record of a moment of vision, reveals the inherently dialectical tension between different configurations of temporality that are visually encoded. The text creates a dynamic union between past and present, and implies the paradox that any view on the present is inherently influenced by the past in the same way as any view on the past is mediated by the present. The idea of the present as a platform from which journeys into time depart and to which they return, implies a recursive model of time, and a dual vision of the present as present, and of the present as past. The metaphor of the platform as a narrative foothold of the present also gains significance in *A Sketch of the Past*:

35 “Woolf’s novels [...] testify to a potential in human experience for perceiving a time out of time, for overcoming the limits of actual life through apprehension of a different mode of being altogether”. Mark Hussey, *The Singing of the Real World*, 117.
2nd May … I write the date, because I think that I have discovered a possible form for these notes. That is, to make them include the present – at least enough of the present to serve as platform to stand upon. It would be interesting to make the two people, I now, I then, come out in contrast. And further, this past is much affected by the present moment (MB, 75).

The date of the entry serves as a marker of the present and introduces the dialectic tension between similarity and difference, which constitutes the temporality of aesthetic vision. Within this temporal configuration the Sketch acquires an aesthetic presence of its own in a doubly encoded present. It both creates the present as a platform from which the narrative can cast itself into the role of a preliminary stage pointing towards a future fulfilment, and, in looking back and recording memories, it seeks to reconnect the work and the subject to its origins in an anachronistic, and a-temporal way. The text invokes both the idea of the linear progression of a journey in time, and, at the same time, it creates a cyclical hermeneutic dynamics of thought. The notion of temporality developed in A Sketch of the Past resists replacing a narrative of progress with one of eternal return and juxtaposes the two. When reflecting on her memoirs, Woolf refers to the metaphor of the platform to express this duality of vision that depends on one’s temporal perspective: “My mother, I was thinking had 2 characters. I was thinking of my memoirs. The platform of time. How I see father from the 2 angles. As a child condemning; as a woman of 58 understanding – I shd say tolerating. Both views true?” (D V, 281 [sic]).

Corresponding to this doubling of her view on time, the way in which the subject recollects remnants of the past requires a kind of self-doubling in the narrative re-enactment of memory, and the creation of a simultaneous vision of past and present. It is this twofold structure of temporality that provides for a fictional play with identity.36 In creating and maintaining the tension between the remembering and remembered self, memories, particularly when they are tied to images, can provide a narrative or pictorial sense of the self. Within a memory, the subject is able to conceive of itself both as an object and as the creator of the scene who is involved in the process of memorising. Woolf stresses the binary nature of reminiscence in A Sketch of the Past, and describes her two first childhood memories: “I begin: the first memory. This was of red and purple flowers on a black ground – my mother’s dress; and she was sitting either in a train or in an omnibus, and I was on her lap” (MB, 64).

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36 Ibid., 26: “Memory thus plays a double role, both disturbing and restoring the individual’s sense of identity”.
The text traces the way in which memories emerge from consciousness. It focuses on the image remembered, and successively supplies it with details of its initial context, expanding the perspective until the images resolve themselves into a scene. Woolf’s ekphrastic use of parataxis balances telling and showing, and imitates children’s language. The structure of the text thus purports to follow the perception of the eye, and, step by step, develops images into narration. This sense of becoming that is inscribed into the unfolding narrative exemplifies what classical rhetoric knew as enargeia, the capacity of language to create images, which turn the reader or listener into a viewer.

Woolf’s second memory relies even more strongly on repetition and alternates between stillness and motion, becoming and being in a way that is reminiscent of the recursive motion of the waves. Similar to the metaphor of the platform the images of the “base” and the “bowl” relate the memory to the present. The scene remembered, however, serves as a focal point to create an immanent temporality of the text, which is capable to expand or contract time according to the emotional breadth of the moment.

If life has a base that it stands upon, if it is a bowl that one fills and fills and fills – then my bowl without a doubt stands upon this memory. It is of lying half asleep, half awake, in bed in the nursery at St Ives. It is of hearing the waves breaking, one, two, one, two, and sending a splash of water over the beach; and then breaking, one, two, one, two, behind a yellow blind. It is of hearing the blind draw its little acorn across the floor as the wind blew the blind out. It is of lying and hearing this splash and seeing this light, and feeling, it is almost impossible that I should be here; of feeling the purest ecstasy I can conceive (MB, 64–65).

The child Virginia perceives the ebb and flow of the world outside in a half-way state of consciousness. This intermediary dimension of her memory is meta-

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38 The character of James, in To the Lighthouse, experiences a childhood memory similar to Virginia Woolf’s in A Sketch of the Past: “the blinds were sucked in and out by the breeze; all was blowing, all was growing; and over all those plates and bowls and tall brandishing red and yellow flowers a very thin yellow veil would be drawn, like a vine leaf, at night. Things became stiller and darker at night. But the leaf-like veil was so fine, that lights lifted it, voices crinkled it; he could see through it a figure stooping, hear, coming close, going away, some dress rustling, some chain tinkling” (TL, 185). Another conspicuous parallel can be found in Thomas Mann’s Buddenbrooks in the description of the first morning of Johann Buddenbrook’s holidays at Travemuende. Buddenbrooks (Frankfurt: Fischer, 53. Aufl., 2004), 630–631: “Das Zimmer lag in dem gelblichen Tageslicht, das schon durch das gestreifte Rouleau hereinfiel, während doch ringsum noch Alles still war [...] Und dieser sanft belebte Friede erfüllte den kleinen Johann alsbald mit
phorically expressed in the semi-transparent blind. The scene creates its distinct temporality in contrasting the linearity implicit in the threefold repetition of an action – “fills, and fills, and fills” –, with the twice recurring sound of the waves breaking: “one, two, one, two”. The narrative progression of the scene itself is therefore paradoxically embedded into a complex of motion and standstill, suggested by the repetitive syntactic pattern, which continuously asserts the presence of the successive impressions in the repeated affirmation of the “it is”. The image which gradually gains imaginative presence in memory is never a finished entity, but depends on being remembered time and again, and created in this potentially infinite process of remembrance. Likewise, Woolf’s method of “telling the past in installments” involves a concentration on details, and the detachment of the moment of being from the past, in order to set it afloat again in an evolving narrative.

In her second ‘first memory’ the cyclical rhythm of the waves and the vision of light gradually converge into an experience of wholeness, and transport the child into a quasi-mystical state of heightened perceptual as well as epistemic activity, which culminates in a moment of synaesthetic rapture: “it is almost impossible that I should be here”. The text traces the very act of coming into being of the remembered scene within a distinct temporality of aesthetic vision, which makes possible the creation of the image in the moment of being until the becoming of the image equals its state of being.

Woolf resorts to her childhood memories in the nursery, because to her they have acquired a presence and reality on their own: “Those moments – in the nursery, on the road to the beach – can still be more real than the present moment” (MB, 67). Her recollection of the past in A Sketch of the Past, in which she envisages the past as a vanishing point of scenes and emotions (“I see it – the past – as an avenue lying behind; a long ribbon of scenes, emotions. There at the end of the avenue still, are the garden and the nursery” (MB, 67)) is paralleled by her recourse to childhood memories in The Waves: “In the beginning there was the nursery” (W, 239).

The child’s eye view, however, does not merely express nostalgia, but rather becomes a prerequisite for aesthetic creation, for seeing something as if it was for the first time. Revisiting this initial moment provides a foundation for Woolf’s writing of memoirs as a distinct form of being in the course of time. For Woolf, the child’s eye view presents a unique kind of impression, which gains its strength through phenomenological and formal simplicity.

der köstlichen Empfindung jener ruhigen, wohlgepflegten und distinguierten Abgeschiedenheit des Bades, die er so über Alles liebte".
Like Roger Fry, who was fascinated by children’s drawings and their perception that is yet unspoiled by habit, Virginia Woolf employs the child’s-eye-view in inaugural scenes of fictional world-making. *Mrs. Dalloway* begins on “a morning – fresh as if issued to children on a beach” (*MD*, 3). The enchanted world of childhood described at the beginning of *The Waves* is composed of light and colour, allows for a shifting of signifiers, and expresses a sense of unfamiliarity and wonder when investigating into the singularity of a momentary vision: “This is our world, lit with crescents and stars of light; and great petals half transparent block the openings like purple windows. Everything is strange” (*W*, 12). The children’s views are distinguished from ordinary vision by their clarity and their delight in the single, isolated object.

In the early episodes of *The Waves*, the imaginative independence of the children’s view, which is not yet reached or tainted by convention, is rendered on a more elegiac note in the episodes concerned with adolescence and middle-age. The six friends revisit scenes from the past, and their meetings mark dialectical moments in time in which union, wholeness and permanence are simultaneously created and suspended. At the farewell dinner for Percival they get together for a last time and their separate memories commonly rooted in childhood are symbolised by the many-petalled “red carnation in a vase”, which both conveys the wholeness of the group of friends and its parts (“a whole flower to which every eye brings its own contribution” (*W*, 82)).

The moment of their meeting, referred to as “now”, creates a comprehensive and almost synaesthetic wholeness that is sustained by their rendering of individual memories:

‘Now let us issue from the darkness of solitude,’ said Louis.
‘Now let us say, brutally and directly, what is in our minds,’ said Neville. ‘Our isolation, our preparation is over. The furtive days of secrecy and hiding, the revelations on staircases, moments of terror and ecstacy’.
‘Old Mrs. Constable lifted her sponge and warmth poured over us,’ said Bernard. ‘We became clothes in this changing, this feeling garment of flesh.’
‘The boot-boy made love to the scullery-maid in the kitchen garden,’ said Susan, ‘among the blown-out washing.’
‘The breath of wind was like a tiger panting,’ said Rhoda.
‘The man lay livid with his throat cut in the gutter,’ said Neville. ‘And going upstairs I could not raise my foot against the immitigable apple tree with its silver leaves held stiff.’

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40 Harvena Richter conflates the poet’s, the painter’s and the child’s view in Woolf’s fiction. Richter, *Virginia Woolf. The Inward Voyage* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977), 82.
‘The leaf danced in the hedge without anyone to blow it,’ said Jinny.
‘In the sun-baked corner,’ said Louis, ‘the petals swam on depths of green.’
‘At Elvedon the gardeners swept and swept with their great brooms, and the woman sat at a
table writing,’ said Bernard.
‘From these close-furled balls of string we draw now every filament,’ said Louis, ‘remember-
ing when we meet’ (W, 80–81).

The characters are disentangling their individual sensations, imaginations and
observations pertaining to their common experiences of the past, the “close-
furled balls of string”, and extend them into the strands of the present narrative.
Louis’ and Neville’s introductory words “now let us” can be read as incantations
summoning into presence the distinct recollections that are to be shared by the
congregation of friends.

Even though the narrative form of the polilogue renders temporality as frag-
mented within the disjoint visions of the separate voices, and conveys the tem-
poral gap between past visions and their present meeting, it is also a quantita-
tive addition of the single recollections, which expands the present moment and
presents the gradual evolving of visions into narrative. In the same way as the six
voices simulate a paradoxical coexistence of the whole and its parts, they also
create a synchronised presence of present and past.

When the death of Percival breaks the continuity between past and present
that the characters were earlier trying to preserve, they are overcome by feelings
of futility, loneliness and meaninglessness. In the absence of Percival, the char-
acters are separated not only from one another, but also from their common past,
which becomes increasingly unreal to them. Even though they try to prevent the
past from streaming away into oblivion by revisiting it, they realise that their
meetings remain charged with the futile hope to remember: “Barns and summer
days in the country, rooms where we sat – all now lie in the unreal world which is
gone. My past is cut from me. […] The past, summer days and rooms where we sat,
stream away like burnt paper with red eyes in it. Why meet and resume?” (W, 99).

The rhetoric of beginnings with its reliance on minimalist forms of sketches
and scenes can be regarded as a strategy in which the text presents itself as a
self-contained unit that creates its own temporality through dialectical constel-
lations. Dynamic temporal processes as well as seemingly timeless standstill are
rendered through perception in which temporal categories of past and present
appear as inherently relational and dependent on individual viewpoints.

Woolf’s treatment of beginnings in which something is rendered as if it were
seen, experienced, and created for the first time adds newness and change as
temporal dimensions pertinent to aesthetic vision. The emphasis on the child’s
eye view relies on this notion of newness, originality, and innocence as it presents
an enquiry into Woolf’s recurrent concern with “the thing before it was made any-
thing” (TL, 193). The temporality of aesthetic vision in Woolf’s works is structured by an anachronistic movement towards imaginary beginnings, in which scenes and images from the past are created ‘as if’ they appear for the first time. This paradox is created through an immanently reflexive structure of the text. Like The Waves, A Sketch of the Past creates the temporality of aesthetic vision as a narrative pursuit of wholeness which involves seeing beyond the surface of the present: “I write this partly in order to recover my sense of the present by getting the past to shadow this broken surface. Let me then, like a child advancing with bare feet into a cold river, descend again into that stream” (MB, 98).

3.3 Jacob’s Room and the space of time

Contemporary reviews both praised and criticised Jacob’s Room for being a segmented novel.41 Whereas it was appreciated for being Woolf’s first experimental work and in this respect for many critics a genuinely Modern one, the more unfavourable reviews accuse Woolf of simply transcribing “fragments she overhears in tube, tram or train” to make a “rag-bag of impressions”, to provide “piecemeal references to personages and things”; and generally hold that “no true novel can be built out of a mere accumulation of these notebook entries”.42

Jacob’s Room creates aesthetic vision in spatio-temporal constellations within an overall anachronistic structure. The formal segmentation of the novel corresponds to its enquiry into the aesthetic function of image-related memories that question the notion of memory as representation. Among the seemingly free-floating impressions and images so prolific and irritating to some critics, spatial metaphors of scaffolding, bricks, tombs, skulls and bones abound and describe an inevitable movement of the narrative towards the death of its central character. Figuratively, however, Jacob Flanders is already dead at the beginning of the novel. This structural anachronism in which the text purports to recon-

41 Virginia Woolf. The Critical Heritage, 93–115. In a letter to Virginia Woolf, Lytton Strachey writes: “One remembers detail after detail – the pier at Scarborough, the rooks and the dinner-bell, the clergyman’s wife on the moors, [...] one’s head swirls round and round.” Ibid., 93. An anonymous reviewer notes that: “Mrs. Woolf has the art of dividing the continuous and yet making one feel that the stream flows remorselessly” Ibid. 96.; Lewis Bettany’s review for the Daily News is one of the more unfavourable ones: “Mrs. Woolf’s new story, which is so full of parentheses and suppressions, so tedious in its rediscoveries of the obvious, and so marred by its occasional lapses into indelicacy, that I found great difficulty in discovering what it was all about”. Ibid. 98.
42 Ibid., 108; 103; 99.
struct something which it first of all creates makes Jacob's past the present of reading. Hence it is possible to read *Jacob's Room* as a memorial or as an elegy when considering its allusions to Rupert Brooke or Thoby Stephen, or even as a monument enclosing the novel itself in a tomblike space. In the *Recherche* Proust draws the analogy between the archiving mechanisms of the mind, the book and the cemetery, that can also be applied to reading *Jacob's Room*, as he illustrates the link between reading and remembering: “A book is a huge cemetery in which on the majority of the tombs the names are effaced and can no longer be read” (*Remembrance* 3: 940).

Whereas monuments for the most part glorify the culture they memorise in a gesture which conveys grief through pride, *Jacob's Room* precludes historic heroism. Like an empty tomb, as an almost literal equivalent to London's “Cenotaph”, *Jacob's Room* centers on an absence and denies the reader access to the internal life of its main character. As such it rather presents a counter-memorial, in which Woolf both explores and interrogates the relation between time, memory and space. In the same vein, the novel inquires into the use of memory when commemorating the past in memorials and monuments. The gesture embodied is twofold and presents the central paradox of *Jacob's Room* in which the urge to memorialise is contrasted with the futility of doing so.

Jacob's absence throughout the novel, and poignantly at its end, causes the anachronistic regress of the narration. In creating Jacob as an inherently elusive character, Woolf employs a principle of character presentation which she later describes in the voice of Clarissa Dalloway: “She would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or were that” (*MD*, 8). The multiple views on Jacob which are portrayed in *Jacob's Room* likewise remain essentially partial, and even their accumulation fails to represent him in a clear-cut picture. Characters observing Jacob thus assert that “[n]obody sees any one as he is” (*JR*, 36), and repeatedly conclude that “[i]t is no use trying to sum people up” (*JR*, 37; 214). Since summing a person up would entail arriving at a definite and fixed picture of them as well as holding them captive within it, *Jacob's Room* refutes any attempt at bringing views on Jacob, or anybody else of the characters to a closure. *Jacob's*

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44 Avrom Fleishman suggests that *Jacob's Room* anticipates *Three Guineas*, and in many ways, the novel presents the same argument in fictional form. *Virginia Woolf: a Critical Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1975).
*Room* makes use of multiple perspectives as a means to illustrate the impossibility to equate seeing and knowing. In the same way as the reader is only given the outward and seemingly random descriptions of the many characters appearing in the novel, they themselves seem to be left to themselves, concerned with their own affairs, and hardly communicating on more than a superficial level: “The proximity of the omnibuses gave the outside passengers an opportunity to stare into each other’s faces. Yet few took advantage of it. Each had his own business to think of. Each had his past shut in him like the leaves of a book known to him by heart; and his friends could only read the title” (*JR*, 85).

Likewise, only the surface, the name and title of Jacob are revealed. Single facets of his character are mostly rendered through external focalisation of third person narrators like Jacob’s former Latin teacher: “‘Now I know that face –’ said Reverend Andrew Floyd, coming out of Carter’s shop in Piccadilly, ‘but who the dickens –?’ and he watched Jacob, turned round to look at him, but could not be sure – ‘Oh, Jacob Flanders!’ he remembered in a flash. But he was so tall; so unconscious; such a fine young fellow” (*JR*, 243). Jacob’s absence from England while he is on his journey in Greece is reflected in Fanny Elmer’s attempt to invoke Jacob’s presence through pictorial substitutes. She idealises Jacob and nourishes her mental image of him in looking at the sculpture of Odysseus in the British Museum in what comes to regular almost therapeutic intervals:

> Sustained entirely upon picture postcards for the past two months, Fanny’s idea of Jacob was more statuesque, noble, and eyeless than ever. To reinforce her vision she had taken to visiting the British Museum, where, keeping her eyes downcast until she was alongside of the battered Ulysses, she opened them and got a fresh shock of Jacob’s presence, enough to last her half a day. But this was wearing thin. And she wrote now – poems, letters that were never posted, saw his face in advertisements on hoardings (*JR*, 238).

This kind of self-inflicted, repeated visual shock-therapy undergone by Fanny to call Jacob into being and to refresh her memory not only results in her never sending her letters or poems, but in summoning up ubiquitous after-images of him. Ironically, however, in trying to attach her mental image of Jacob to the fixed entity of a statue in what becomes almost a compulsion to repeat, she confines him to a lifeless effigy. The ambiguity between life and lifelessness in *Jacob’s Room* is created in analogous constellations between the visible and the invisible, the present and the absent. Like the Odysseus-statue coming to life for Fanny, images and objects related to Jacob become virtually more alive than he is. Contrary to her intention to fight against oblivion, however, Jacob to her has already become an exhibit in the museum, and a monument of the past that is dead and in this way uncannily immortal.
Jacob’s Room treats temporality within a semiotic and metaphorical perspective rather than from the protagonist’s point of view. Impressions, images, and image-related memories become a structural device, and serve to establish significant correspondences between temporally and spatially distant elements, and the reader is introduced into this internal frame of reference built on recurring emblematic images. In repeatedly focusing on details and dwelling on single episodes, the text creates a relational network, forges links, and sets visual markers. Emblematic images, in particular, acquire significance when they are linked to the dominant theme of death lurking beneath the surface and provide a mnemonic arrangement of focal points. Jacob’s Room is interspersed with the appearance of bones and skulls which both serve as reminders of death and the past and as premonitions of the future.

Similar to the boar’s head hanging on the wall in To the Lighthouse (TL, 115) which frightens and fascinates the two children respectively, the image of the skull at the opening of Jacob’s Room is a paradoxical symbol which constitutes one of Jacob’s earliest perceptions as a child roaming the Cornish beach, and which likewise points to Jacob’s own death: “There he stood. His face composed itself. He was about to roar when, lying among the black sticks and straw under the cliff, he saw a whole skull – perhaps a cow’s skull, a skull, perhaps, with the teeth in it” (JR, 7). The finding of the skull presents a disturbing element given within the context of a seemingly peaceful scene on the beach. Like a piece of jetsam, the skull is found next to a pair of lovers, and the juxtaposition of death and love forms a semiotic opposition which builds up the central tension of the novel: “There on the sand not far from the lovers lay the old sheep’s skull without its jaw. Clean, white, wind-swept, sand-rubbed, a more unpolluted piece of bone existed nowhere on the coast of Cornwall” (JR, 8).

The symbolic combination of life and death is taken up later in the novel when the skull reappears as an ornament in the description of the interior of Jacob’s room in Cambridge: “a rose or a ram’s skull is carved in the wood. The eighteenth century has its distinction” (JR, 94). The emblematic image visually encodes different levels of temporality and presents the central ambivalence of the novel. In exposing the duality of perception, the conflation of both symbols “a rose or a ram’s skull” (JR, 246) is at once charged with the double notion of eros and thanatos, and serves as a memento mori which supports the analogy between the room and the tomb. The recurrent pattern of significant images not only creates a network of associations that hold the text together, but it also appeals to the reader’s memory. The anticipated perspective of the reader in Jacob’s Room is one of synthesising or unifying through memory, and of creating links between otherwise disparate elements. For the reader, Jacob’s Room therefore becomes a mnemonic space that is temporally structured by
images that add a vertical dimension of symbolism to the linear succession of scenes.

Memory in *Jacob's Room* is described as an ambiguous process of collecting, recollecting, and preserving. It is spatially encoded in the room as the novel's central metonymy. The mnemonic texture of *Jacob's Room* encourages a process of reading as recuperating the absent, the unseen and the overlooked, and of transforming it into a significant, yet momentary whole. As scattered fragmentary impressions circle round him in a kaleidoscopic way ("yet all the while having for centre, for magnet, a young man alone in his room" (*JR*, 129)), Jacob and his metonymic room attract multiple readings, and the reader also becomes a collector, who catalogues details, lists particularities about characters, and classifies objects in the room, all of which pertain to the aura of absence, an absence which is more of an "uncanny presence".45

The movement of the narration accordingly vacillates between the panoramic point of view of an omniscient narrator and the characters' dispersed perspectives. It never reaches beneath the surface and proceeds from one object to the next similar to the movement of sunlight inside a room, which is only able to illuminate the shape of the objects, but not their substance: "Back came the sun, dazzlingly. It fell like an eye upon the stirrups, and then suddenly and yet very gently rested upon the bed, upon the alarum clock, and upon the butterfly box stood open" (*JR*, 27).

Not unlike the open box from which the butterflies have escaped, Jacob's character forms an epistemological vacuum. Jacob increasingly withdraws from any attempt to be classified by a single view of him, until his final absence poignantly exposes the irretrievable loss of a signifier to which all the signs could formerly relate. The absence of the signifier is complemented by a narrative process of multiplying the signs. Rather than establishing causal relations between the signs to create coherence, the text activates their metonymical potential to present the absent: "One fibre in the wicker armchair creaks, though no one sits there" (*JR*, 49).

In *Jacob's Room* image- or object-related memories are powerful, yet fallible. The text displays at the same time a distraction of memory through providing numerous possibilities of meaning and relevance, and a concentration of visual memory materialising in emblematic images. Symbolised by material objects, and, above all, the empty room, perceptions, perspectives and memories constitute the symbolic universe of the text, whilst maintaining the balance between the seen and the unseen. Jacob's character epitomises this central ambivalence,

45 Kazan, “Description and the Pictorial in *Jacob's Room*”, 711.
in the metonymic image of the black box, which both can be read as a symbol of
death and as the ‘black box’ later known in psychology, representing the unfath-
omable character of the human mind. Jacob’s box, however, is not empty, and
contains letters and a pair of trousers:

Jacob threw them into the black wooden box where he kept his mother’s letters, his old
flannel trousers, and a note or two with the Cornish postmark. The lid shut upon the truth.
This black wooden box, upon which his name was still legible in white paint, stood between
the long windows of the sitting-room (JR, 93).

In Jacob’s Room, the narrative follows the structure of a search for what is lost,
in the awareness of the futility of any hope of finding it. The motif of a search
for the evanescent is metaphorically present in Jacob’s habit of catching butter-
flies and moths. In the same way as both species symbolise the duality of the
visual and the unvisual, day and night, life and death, they metaphorically point
to the process of reading as collecting fragments (JR, 26). Apart from the novel’s
presentation of collecting on the level of character creation, Jacob’s Room uses
collecting or re-collecting as a metaphor for the vain effort of the novelist to catch
life: “It is thus that we live, they say, driven by an unseizable force. They say that
the novelists never catch it; that it goes hurtling through their nets and leaves
them torn to ribbons. This, they say, is what we live by – this unseizable force”
(JR, 217). Furthermore, the metaphor of collecting butterflies characterises Jacob
as the searcher who cannot be found himself. Like moths circling around light
and striving towards it, scattered fragments of perspective, providing clues for
the reader, draw him closer to Jacob’s character without granting him any final
insight apart from the conclusion that final insight cannot be reached.

Like the antiquary or the collector, the novelist strives to disclose the unseen,
to order and categorise it. He is, however, confronted with the dilemma that in the
very moment of its fixation, the present becomes the past, and life becomes death.
In equating the novelist, who engages in the inherently futile task of keeping life
– past or present – alive, to the butterfly catcher, who aims at conserving and
exhibiting life, the text reveals the deceptive character of preservation in asserting
that the exhibit is always either only a part or a substitute of the original, but
never the thing itself.

46 Harvena Richter, “Hunting the Moth: Virginia Woolf and the Creative Imagination”, Virginia
47 In Moments of Being, Woolf describes how Jack Hills introduced her to Morris’ book on but-
terflies: “He taught us to sugar trees; he gave us his copy of Morris’s Butterflies and Moths, over
which I spent many hours, hunting up our catches among all those pictures of hearts and darts
and setaceous Hebrew characters” (MB, 104).
The anachronistic temporality of aesthetic vision questions any unambiguous reference, and inaugurates the dynamics of deferral and approximation, in which seeing, like loving, in *Jacob’s Room* never means possessing, and the textual processes of search and recollection never arrive at an accurate or reassuring representation.

In *Jacob’s Room* the narrative rather subverts the tendency of containment by means of metaphorically exposing methods of confinement that are connected to memory and conservation. The metaphor of boxes and containers set within the context of the theme of death is pervasive in *Jacob’s Room*. When Mrs. Flanders searches for her brooch she lost in the moor, the narrator presents the moor as a naturalistic warehouse or treasure chamber:

> The moor accepted everything. Tom Gage cries aloud so long as his tombstone endures. The Roman skeletons are in safe keeping. Betty Flanders’ darning needles are safe too and her garnet brooch. And sometimes at mid-day, in the sunshine, the moor seems to hoard these little treasures, like a nurse (*JR*, 184).

As an equivalent to the moor as a receptacle of a multiplicity of lost material objects, the British Museum is presented as a large mind storing immaterial intellectual goods. In *Jacob’s Room*, the museum and the archive are metaphors of memory and artificial storage mechanisms, exhibiting the visible and keeping the unseen in reserve. In *Jacob’s Room*, the notion of the archive is employed both as a metaphor and as an institutionalised form of memory.

In *Jacob’s Room*, the British Museum is compared to an exteriorised mind and an archiving mechanism for memory, in which the metaphor of the ‘treasure chamber of memory’ is transferred to society at large. The British Museum is first of all portrayed as an uncanny and inscrutable self-perpetuating system:

> There is in the British Museum an enormous mind. Consider that Plato is there cheek by jowl with Aristotle; and Shakespeare with Marlowe. This great mind is hoarded beyond the power of any single mind to possess it. [...] The vast mind was sheeted with stone; and each compartment in the depths of it was safe and dry. The night-watchmen, flashing their lanterns over the backs of Plato and Shakespeare, [...] poor, highly respectable.
men, with wives and families at Kentish Town, do their best for twenty years to protect Plato and Shakespeare and then are buried at Highgate. Stone lies solid over the British Museum, as bone lies cool over the visions and heat of the brain. Only here the brain is Plato’s brain and Shakespeare’s; the brain has made pots and statues, great bulls and little jewels, and crossed the river of death this way and that incessantly, seeking some landing, now wrapping the body well for its long sleep; now laying a penny piece on the eyes (JR, 148–149).

The museum resembles a tomb, and the force behind the archiving mechanism remains unknown even to the guardians, who protect it and ensure its existence, but will themselves not be included in the vast mechanism of remembrance. *Jacob’s Room* criticises the urge to memorialise in national terms. The novel rather explores the intersection of personal memory and history in exposing the failure of ideological or collective constructions of memory as representation. The temporality of aesthetic vision created in terms which are spatial and image-related rather asserts an open and also paradoxical process in which forms and phenomena allow for both a contraction and an extension of temporality according to the individualised span of the moment.

*Jacob’s Room* correspondingly ends with an everyday object submitted to the memory of the reader: the “pair of Jacob’s old shoes”. Woolf had used shoes and boots as a metonymy for people in *The Voyage Out*: “I always think that people are so like their boots’, said Miss Allan” (TVO, 243), and later she employed the image in *To the Lighthouse* in Lily Briscoe’s praise of Mr. Ramsay’s boots (TL, 153).

In *The Waves*, the friends mourn for the loss of Percival: “The figure that was robed in beauty is now clothed in ruin. The figure that stood in the grove where the steep-backed hills come down falls in ruin, as I told them when they said they loved his voice on the stair, and his old shoes and moments of being together” (W, 104).

Although the pair of old shoes in *Jacob’s Room* is reminiscent of the still life of old shoes drawn by Van Gogh⁴⁹, the image of Jacob’s shoes is not merely the narrative equivalent of a painted still-life. The shoes capture Jacob’s life-journey in a poetic image that expresses the duration of time in an instant. Like a painting the shoes metonymically represent Jacob’s absence. Heidegger’s famous interpretation of Van Gogh’s picture in “Die Wahrheit des Kunstwerks” argues that Van Gogh’s painting is not a mimetic illustration of an everyday object, but that it illustrates how being comes into the picture. Heidegger’s argument can be taken as an extension of the temporal logic in *Jacob’s Room*, in which the presence of

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the image paradoxically asserts a world through absence – an absence most profoundly marked in death.

The novel, however, does not just end in death but with a question, which expresses the final loss of the signifier as well as the altered nature of the quotidian object, which is taken out of its functional context and made to resemble a work of art. Mrs. Flanders’ open question “What am I to do with these?” hands the problem of interpretation over to the reader, and marks aesthetic vision as a performance of temporality which is left to the dynamics of reading as preservation, repetition and renewal. “The continuous present is created only in the act of reading”, \(^50\) writes Mark Hussey, and one also realises that what is lost in Jacob’s Room has never been present to the reader in the first place.

3.4 “Was that the end?” – Between the Acts and the paradox of vision in time

Woolf’s later works are not only concerned with different experiments in biographical writing, but also with narrative strategies in which vision and temporality materialise into constellations between individual life time and collective history.\(^51\) In addition to her work on the biography of Roger Fry and her own memoir, Woolf was preoccupied with writing what was going to be her last novel, Between the Acts. The novel bears close relations to some of her contemporaneous works in terms of form and theme. Some of the childhood recollections she describes in A Sketch of the Past reappear as motifs in Between the

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\(^50\) Mark Hussey, The Singing of the Real World, 124.

\(^51\) Woolf began writing the novel, whose working title was ‘Pointz Hall’ in April 1938. In an entry into her diary on 26 April 1938 she describes her project (“to sketch out a new book”) in a similar way to that of The Waves, where she experiments with themes and style: “Yet in spite of that here am I sketching out a new book; only dont please impose that huge burden on me again, I implore. Let it be random & tentative; something I can blow of a morning, to relieve myself of Roger: dont, I implore, lay down a scheme; call in all the cosmic immensities; & force my tired & diffident brain to embrace another whole – all parts contributing – not yet awhile. But to amuse myself let me note: why not Poyntzet Hall: a centre: all lit. discussed in connection with real little incongruous living humour; & anything that comes into my head; but “I” rejected: ‘We’ substituted: to whom at the end there shall be an invocation? “We” ... composed of many different things ... we all life, all art, all waifs & strays – a rambling capricious but somehow unified whole – the present state of my mind? An English country; & a scenic old house – & a terrace where nursemaids walk? & people passing – & a perpetual variety & change from intensity to prose. & facts – & notes; & – but eno’’ (D V, 135).
Acts.\textsuperscript{52} The novel is not only formally related to the earlier piece of short fiction, “The Moment: Summer’s Night”, but its transient and “sketchy” nature was one of the reasons why Woolf had initially decided against its publication.\textsuperscript{53}

Although the novel observes the Aristotelian unities of time and place, the narrative trajectory of \textit{Between the Acts} is inherently a temporal arc\textsuperscript{54} in which the idea of in-between-ness is enacted on the temporal level of aesthetic vision. Space and time in \textit{Between the Acts} are simultaneously encoded in different referential contexts as the novel is set between historical remoteness and the proximity of the present, between the two World Wars, between word and image, between the individual and the collective, between nature and artifice and between actors and spectators.

Woolf’s method of scene-making in which she relates aesthetic vision and temporality is taken up in ‘the play in the play’, the ‘scenes from English history’. Not unlike \textit{Jacob’s Room}, \textit{Between the Acts} is not divided into chapters, but falls into a succession of scenes and episodes of various lengths. The transitions between the early scenes of the novel are marked by their alternately foregrounding either time or place. From the very beginning, the novel shifts between different time frames which correspond to different angles of perspective. From the initial ‘moment of a summer’s night’ inside Pointz Hall, the narrative moves to the description of an aerial view of it in the morning: “Pointz Hall was seen in the light of an early summer morning to be a middle-sized house” (BA, 3). At the end of the scene, the narrative returns to the interior of the house, and focuses on the image of a moment frozen in time: “under a glass case there was a watch that had stopped a bullet on the field of Waterloo” (BA, 3). The watch displayed behind the glass case metonymically represents the spatiotemporal construction of the novel, which creates a time and place of relative isolation located between the impact of war and the lifetime of the individual. The momentary suspension of temporality is related to the secluded and empty interior of the house in the “remote village in the very heart of England” (BA, 9).

\textsuperscript{52} These include the vision of a flower’s completeness, the skeleton of the dog in the swamp and the sheep’s thigh bone recovered from the lily pond.

\textsuperscript{53} Woolf writes to John Lehmann that she has decided against the publication of \textit{Between the Acts}, and she points out that, among other things, the novel was “too slight & sketchy” (L VI, 482).

\textsuperscript{54} Frieder Stadtfeld has noted the correspondence between the time frame of the pageant and the centuries it covers from 15:00 until 19:20 on the day of the performance. “Virginia Woolf’s letzter Roman: ‘more quintessential than the others’”, \textit{Anglia} 91 (1973), 58 n. 5.
The centrality of time and place is defined by the novel’s many structural oppositions in which people and places can be two different things at the same time. Pointz Hall is simultaneously referred to as a presently visible shape, and as an event in history at large. Parts of the house such as the larder which once was a chapel indicate a shift between present foreground and past background. Likewise the inhabitants of Pointz Hall are referred to by their real names as well as their nicknames: “She would save a slice for Sunny – his drawing-room name Sung-Yen had undergone a kitchen change into Sunny” (BA, 19).

Like the site of the mansion itself, which represents the contrast between nature and the work of man – “Nature had provided a site for a house; man had built his house in a hollow” (BA, 5) – the two other main locations of the novel, the barn and the dip of the ground as the stage for the pageant, are encoded in two time frames.

The Barn to which Lucy had nailed her placard was a great building in the farmyard. It was as old as the church, and built of the same stone, but it had no steeple. It was raised on cones of grey stone at the corners to protect it from rats and damp. Those who had been to Greece always said it reminded them of a temple. Those who had never been to Greece – the majority – admires it all the same (BA, 15).

The barn is presented both as a secularised version of the village church and as a monument of ancient Greece. The place for the stage beyond the terrace is equally ambivalent and creates a paradoxical site of imaginary artifice, “the natural stage” (BA, 47), against the backdrop of the English countryside. Miss La Trobe’s enthusiasm about the spot – “That’s the place for a pageant, Mr. Oliver!’ she had exclaimed. [...] ‘There the stage; here the audience; and down there among the bushes a perfect dressing-room for the actors’” (BA, 35) – reiterates the scene in A Midsummer Night’s Dream when Peter Quince inspects the place in the wood for the rehearsal of the interlude: “Pat, pat; and here’s a marvail’s convenient place for our rehearsal. This green plot shall be our stage, this hawthorn brake our tiring-house” (MND, 3.1.2–5).

Like Shakespeare’s “green plot”, which, apart from being the theatrical stage, is at once the enchanted realm of ‘Faerieland’, the rehearsal stage for the play in the play, and the place of confusion for the lovers, the terrace in Between the Acts presents a site of vision in between the real place and the imaginary space, between the timeless infinity of the view and the contemporary position of the

audience: “The lawn was as flat as the floor of a theatre. The terrace, rising, made a natural stage. The trees barred the stage like pillars. And the human figure was seen to great advantage against a background of sky” (BA, 47).

A Midsummer Night’s Dream also provides a model for Woolf’s double plot and the idea of the play in the play. Woolf’s last novel investigates into the theatre, the annual village pageant as a visual means in which elements of the past may be reinterpreted in the present by an audience. It presents a space in time, into which different levels of temporality converge, and where what is visible can be different things at the same time.56

Before the novel turns to the “Scenes from English History” performed by the villagers, it introduces different kinds of individualised temporality. The interaction and collision of the subjective time-frames of the characters is given as a set of discontinuing and momentary overlapping scenes in otherwise incongruous lives. Inspired by reading “An Outline of History”, Mrs. Swithin indulges into a daydream about the prehistoric past until her sense of time is suspended, and the vision of the past takes over her perception of the present:

It took her five seconds in actual time, in mind time ever so much longer, to separate Grace herself, with blue china on a tray, from the leather-covered grunting monster who was about, as the door opened, to demolish a whole tree in the green steaming undergrowth of the primeval forest (BA, 4).

For Lucy Swithin, it is not only the return to the past which shapes her vision of the present, but also present sights and sounds inspire her to expand the present moment into the past or the future: “An obliging thrush hopped across the lawn; a coil of pinkish rubber twisted in its beak. Tempted by the sight to continue her imaginative reconstruction of the past, Mrs. Swithin paused; she was given to increasing the bounds of the moment by flights into past or future” (BA, 5).

The narrative alternates between the expansion of a single moment within the individual vision or reverie of a character and the subsequent resuming of the plot in the context of another scene. 57 Old Mr. Oliver interrupts his grandson’s play (BA, 6–7), and is himself interrupted by Isa when he dreams about his youth in India (BA, 10).58

The novel, however, neither adheres to a narrative of teleological progression nor to a cyclical pattern of time, but it presents a structural principle of varied repetition in which characters are both immersed in time and exempt from it. In contrast to Giles, whose sense of time is controlled by causality, Lucy Swithin indulges into the moment and invests it with meaning and history. She brings linear time to a standstill, and instead expands the moment within her imagination by releasing a chain of associations about the components and the origin of quotidian things such as the loaf of bread she is about to cut.

The cook’s hands cut, cut, cut. Whereas Lucy, holding the loaf, held the knife up. Why’s stale bread, she mused, easier to cut than fresh? And so skipped, sidelong, from yeast to alcohol; so to fermentation; so to inebriation; so to Bacchus; and lay under purple lamps in a vineyard in Italy, as she had done, often; while Sands heard the clock tick; saw the cat; noted a fly buzz (BA, 20).

Lucy Swithin creates an imaginary causality, and the cook, Mrs. Sands, works steadily and mechanically observing time – “cut, cut, cut” – like sand in an hourglass inevitably running its course determined by gravity, Lucy is inspired by what she sees and steps out of actual time when she inquires into its past. When she takes William Dodge on a tour around the house, she embarks on a journey backwards in time, and the succession of rooms they visit reconnects her to her childhood: “Mrs. Swithin stopped by the bed. ‘Here,’ she said, ‘yes, here,’ she tapped the counterpane. ‘I was born. In this bed’” (BA, 43).

Whereas Isa remains entangled in her personal and domestic predicament, Lucy freely moves between time and space. The difference between both women is illustrated in the novel’s predominant imagery of birds. The birds associated with Isa – swans with webbed feet, and the faded peacocks on her dressing gown – remain in their respective element and either float on water or stay on ground. Lucy, who stays at Pointz Hall during the summer and spends her winters in Hastings (BA, 4), however, is compared to seasonal birds. She likes to look at the swallows which to her represent the return of the same (BA, 63), and her brother even refers to her as “sister swallow” (BA, 72). After the play, when she looks at the lily pool, she finds herself between two elements, and in “caressing her cross” she asserts the semantic energy residing in paradoxical binary constellations: “Above, the air rushed; beneath was water. She stood between two fluidities, caressing her cross” (BA, 127). Her supple sense of time and reality defies any state of being tied down to convention, religion, materiality, or even to her own body: “Really! It was her brother! And his dog! She seemed to see them for the first time. Was it that she had no body? Up in the clouds, like an air ball, her mind touched ground now and then with a shock of surprise” (BA, 72).
Lucy is capable of seeing the extraordinary within the ordinary, of reversing time and bringing it to a stop. When she is described as “The old girl with a wisp of white hair flying” (*BA*, 16), she is attributed a similar airy nature as that of the clouds whose movement abides by no particular law, and who seem to dwell in a time and space between eternity and actual time.

There was a fecklessness, a lack of symmetry and order in the clouds, as they thinned and thickened. Was it their own law, or no law, they obeyed? Some were wisps of white hair merely. One, high up, very distant, had hardened to golden alabaster; was made of immortal marble. Beyond that was blue, pure blue, black blue, blue that had never filtered down; that had escaped registration. It never fell as sun, shadow, or rain upon the world, but disregarded the little coloured ball of earth entirely (*BA*, 13).

The view of the sky presents an image of eternity, immortality and timelessness which transcends emotion, colour and form. From the disinterested orbital vantage point timelessness converges into colourlessness, and in Pointz Hall, the possibility of a limitless extension of the horizontal as well as the vertical view simultaneously threatens, bores and fascinates the different characters. Whereas Mrs. Manresa is tired by the endless repetition of what she sees (*BA*, 41), William Dodge and Lucy Swithin are inspired by the vastness of the view to broaden their minds and make their inner vision correspond to what they see: “Mrs. Swithin and William surveyed the view aloofly, and with detachment. How tempting, how very tempting, to let the view triumph; to reflect its ripple; to let their own minds ripple; to let outlines elongate and pitch over – so – with a sudden jerk” (*BA*, 41).

The relativity of individual time is emphasised when it is seen against history at large: “Only something over a hundred and twenty years the Olivers had been there” (*BA*, 3), and when characters are preoccupied with tracing the etiologies and etymologies of people, buildings and expressions. The concerns of the individuals with time are contrasted by the invocations to timelessness and the eternal. The timelessness of the ever-present view in this respect conveys a sense of beauty, which lies in the immutable. Lucy Swithin finds reassurance in the recurrence of sameness and infinity promised by the view, because it will prevail over their individual lives:

They looked at the view; they looked at what they knew, to see if what they knew might perhaps be different today. Most days it was the same. ‘That’s what makes a view so sad,’ said Mrs. Swithin, lowering herself into the deck-chair which Giles had brought her. ‘And so beautiful. It’ll be there,’ she nodded at the strip of gauze laid upon the distant fields, ‘when we’re not’ (*BA*, 32).
Lucy Swithin and her brother complement each other in a seemingly infinite process: “But, brother and sister, flesh and blood was not a barrier, but a mist. Nothing changed their affection; no argument; no fact; no truth. What she saw he didn’t; what he saw she didn’t – and so on, ad infinitum” (BA, 15). They inhabit a timeless present in which ‘time does not exist’ (BA, 51).

3.4.1 Vision and silence

In Between the Acts, the opposition between word and image is rendered in terms of vision in time. Lucy and Bartholomew’s resistance to temporal progression corresponds to their position as members of the audience to the pageant, which is marked by its silence and inaction: “There was nothing for the audience to do. Mrs. Manresa suppressed a yawn. They were silent. They stared at the view, as if something might happen in one of those fields to relieve them of the intolerable burden of sitting silent, doing nothing, in company” (BA, 40). The equanimity of the older generation is contrasted by the restlessness of the younger. Whereas Lucy and Bartholomew are contented with being the audience – “‘Our part,’ said Bartholomew, ‘is to be the audience. And a very important part too’” (BA, 36); “We remain seated” – “We are the audience” (BA, 37) – Isa, Giles, and William – for different reasons, suffer from it. For Giles being forced to remain seated and to merely watch it is dramatised as Promethean agony: “This afternoon he wasn’t Giles Oliver come to see the villagers act their annual pageant; manacled to a rock he was, and forced passively to behold indescribable horror” (BA, 37), and even during the interval, he “remained like a stake in the tide of the flowing company” (BA, 60). The “monstrous inversion”, which Giles calls the sight of the snake and the toad caught between life and death, eating and being eaten, presents the standstill of a dilemma, which he resolves in killing both animals: “But it was action. Action relieved him” (BA, 62).

Giles’ sense of being held captive is shared by Isa and applied to their marriage, in which she feels caged and torn between love and hate:

Giles glared. With his hands bound tight round his knees he stared at the flat fields. Staring, glaring, he sat silent. Isabella felt imprisoned. Through the bars of the prison, through the sleepy haze that deflected them, blunt arrows bruised her; of love, then of hate (BA, 41).

The verb ‘glare’ throughout the novel indicates a way of seeing that implies the frozen, silent, and motionless stance of the viewer. At the beginning of the pageant it is used to describe the audience from Miss La Trobe’s perspective: “They glared as if they were exposed to a frost that nipped them and fixed them all at the same level. Only Bond the cowman looked fluid and natural” (BA, 48).
The idea of paradox and of a stationary void between two mutually-exclusive alternatives is illustrated in situations of choice and contrasting options. William is undecided about what to do during the interval: “‘Shall I,’ he murmured, ‘go or stay?’” (BA, 60), and characters are constantly concerned about the weather: “And which will it be? Mrs. Swithin continued. ‘Wet or fine?’” (BA, 13). Likewise, the Afghan hound is of a twofold nature, which is beyond the reach of human attempts to tame it: “His tail never wagged. He never admitted the ties of domesticity. Either he cringed or he bit. Now his wild yellow eyes gazed at her, gazed at him. He could outstare them both” (BA, 10).

One of the most prominent oppositions of the novel is illustrated by the two portraits of a male ancestor and an unknown woman, which convey the legacy of the past and contrast the silence of the nameless female with the ‘talk-producing’ ancestor, who has a name, which, however, remains unknown to the reader:

Two pictures hung opposite the window. In real life they had never met, the long lady and the man holding his horse by the rein. The lady was a picture, bought by Oliver because he liked the picture; the man was an ancestor. He had a name. He held the rein in his hand. [...] He was a talk producer, that ancestor. But the lady was a picture (BA, 21–22).

The two portraits present opposites in visual and temporal form. Their juxtaposition enables the present viewer to connect the two otherwise unrelated lives of the portrayed – one of them of realistic, the other one of obscure origin – who: “in real life [they] had never met”. Apart from their gendering of language and silence, the portraits correspond to different models of temporality. The ‘portrait of the lady’ identifies the silent image with femininity, the unreferential, and unreal (“the lady was a picture”), and conveys a sense of timelessness similar to the outlasting view overlooking the countryside: “They all looked at the lady. But she looked over their heads, looking at nothing. She led them down green glades into the heart of silence” (BA, 30). The analogy of vision, silence and timelessness is contrasted by the link between words, masculinity and ancestral heritage, reflecting the novel’s broader concern with temporality and language.

The characters’ difficulty to communicate becomes apparent in the elliptic course of their conversations. Rather than finishing Hamlet’s soliloquy, which reflects the novel’s concern with mutually exclusive alternatives, each of them recalls lines from different Shakespearean soliloquies, which are expressive of their respective plight:

To be, or not to be, that is the question. Whether ‘tis nobler ... Go on!’ she nudged Giles, who sat next her. ‘Fade far away and quite forget what thou amongst the leaves hast never known ...’ Isa supplied the first words that came into her head by way of helping her husband out of his difficulty. ‘The weariness, the torture, and the fret ...’ William Dodge added, burying the end of his cigarette in a grave between two stones (BA, 33).
Giles’ inability to complete Hamlet’s soliloquy illustrates his dilemma, which he interprets as not having a choice and not being able to act. It is Lucy, who interrupts the indiscriminate amalgamation of quotations, who implicitly reminds the group that they are spectators rather than actors, and advises them to look at what lies beyond words: “‘We haven’t the words – we haven’t the words,’ Mrs. Swithin protested. ‘Behind the eyes; not on the lips; that’s all!’” (BA, 34). Her appeal to the superiority of the mind and images that lie “behind the eyes” is challenged by her brother’s view, who cannot imagine thoughts beyond words: “‘Thoughts without words,’ her brother mused. ‘Can that be?’” (BA, 34).

Lucy, however, often communicates without words by looking at another person, such as William Dodge, or by contemplating a view or an object. When she and the others look at the two portraits, she translates the silence of the ancestor’s picture into the very words, which to her might have led to the painting of the picture: “‘I always feel,’ Lucy broke the silence, ‘he’s saying: ‘Paint my dog’” (BA, 30).

The thoughts of Lucy and Isa attach themselves to images instead of words. Rather than speaking, Isa prefers to watch in silence: “In all this sound of welcome, protestation, apology and again welcome, there was an element of silence, supplied by Isabella, observing the unknown young man” (BA, 23). For Isa, words of poetry transform into images: “words made two rings, perfect rings, that floated them” (BA, 2), and when she later reflects on her encounter with Mr. Haines, she fails to do the reverse and translate images into words: “the words he said, handing her a teacup, handing her a tennis racquet, could so attach themselves to a certain spot in her; and thus lie between them like a wire, tingling, tangling, vibrating – she groped, in the depths of the looking glass, for a word” (BA, 8).

The elusiveness of language in *Between the Acts* is not only reflected in the characters’ search for words, or the fugitive nature of a moment in time, but also within a temporal pattern of continuation and onward movement in which words can be exhausted, used up, and like the nurses steadily “trundling” the perambulator and “rolling words”, words are wearing thin and leave only faint sensations of taste and colour:

> The nurses after breakfast were trundling the perambulator up and down the terrace; and as they trundled they were talking – not shaping pellets of information or handing ideas from one to another, but rolling words, like sweets on their tongues; which as they thinned to transparency, gave off pink, green, and sweetness (BA, 5).

The novel’s critique of conventional language is expressed within the chronological model of time of the pageant. Even though history is presented as a linear progression of scenes, words are mainly linked to the idea of repetition as a kind
of eternal recurrence based on natural cycles as in the repeated song of the villagers “the earth is always the same, summer and winter and spring; and spring and winter again; ploughing and sowing, eating and growing; time passes. ... The wind blew the words away” (BA, 78).

For the most part of the pageant, words do not reach the audience (BA, 48), voices peter out (BA, 59), actors forget their lines (BA, 53), and words are being blown away by the wind (BA, 77). Miss La Trobe only hears “scraps and fragments” of the conversation when the audience is assembling (BA, 75). During the pageant, the visual impact of the scene is given prominence over words, which are either inaudible, forgotten, or about which the narrator repeatedly insists that: “It didn’t matter what the words were; or who sang what” (BA, 58).

The temporal linearity of sentences or songs is continuously broken, and the sound of words appears equally ephemeral as that of music. The contrast between sound and silence, however, is cast into a modulated progression in which time inverts itself when silences give way to sounds, and sounds drown into the silence that precedes them.

When the Reverend Streatfield offers his verbose summary of the pageant’s meaning, La Trobe, whose play he is summarising, remains conspicuously “invisible”: “O Lord, protect and preserve us from words the defilers, from words the impure! What need have we of words to remind us? Must I be Thomas, you Jane?” (BA, 117).

The impurity of words he refers to reveals a profound skepticism about language in general and can also be read as a comment on the use of words in contemporary war propaganda. In mounting the soapbox, where previously characters of the pageant had stood and delivered their speeches, the Reverend unwittingly becomes part of the performance, and adds an element to history becoming histrionic. At the end of the pageant, the Reverend has “no further use for words” (BA, 120). His closing words of thanks do not succeed in creating unity, but they are “cut in two” (BA, 119) by the appearance of the planes.

Like in the early scenes of the novel, the temporality of aesthetic vision expressed in the pageant is essentially one of alternation between fixity and flux, between pictorial stasis and narrative motion, achieved by the contraction of the narrative into the formal unity of the scene, and its dissolution, or “dispersal” during the intervals. Motion and standstill, however, do not provide stable categories into which parts of the novel can be clearly divided. The scenes of the pageant convey stasis and progression at the same time, and the description of the audience is equally ambivalent when it expresses both standstill and motion in pictorial terms: “Soon the lawns were floating with little moving islands of coloured dresses. Yet some of the audience remained seated” (BA, 93). The paradoxical image of the “moving island” not only resolves the novel’s opposition
between motion and standstill, but it also reverberates in the analogous contrast between land and water. As a synonym for England, the island marks the uncertain state of the country in the present, and is a paradoxical symbol of the insularity of Pointz Hall in ‘the heart of the country’. The audience moreover epitomises both the stasis, isolation and dryness of an island, and the collective fluidity of the stream, when it inundates the lawns and when it gathers together again at the end of the interval: “The audience was streaming back to the terrace” (BA, 97). The indistinct clusters of people moving during the interval pictorially express a moment in time when both the larger state of the nation, and the state of the individual are linked by a shared condition of non-attachment: “Yet somehow they felt – how could one put it – a little not quite here or there. As if the play had jerked the ball out of the cup; as if what I call myself was still floating unattached, and didn’t settle. Not quite themselves, they felt” (BA, 93).

The structure of the narrative itself creates scenes from the pageant as islands in the stream of the historical meta-narrative within an overall temporality fluctuating between acts and intervals. In the performance of the annual pageant, the time passing in the novel is cast into scenes within a play about the passing of historical time, in which the unity of the scene is orchestrated into a larger historical context. The reader is constantly made aware of more than one dimension of time, and enabled to correlate them. Reading time interacts with the time of the narration and the received ideas of historical time represented in the scenes. Scenes appear as signatures of temporality, and the scenic arrangement of the novel turns the reader into a spectator and a part of the audience.

In addition to temporal condensation and flux, transhistorical timelessness lingers above the present time of the novel and the presentation of immanent time in the performance, and makes it possible to relate as well as to question the impact of the past on the present and the future. In constantly combining small, contracted units of time with larger expanding ones, the novel stresses their mutual dependence and reveals the paradoxical simultaneity of temporal distance and immediacy.

Playing on historical remoteness and history made recognisable in the present-day, the pageant brings forth a hermeneutic interplay of comparison, interrelation, and differentiation. During the play, temporal oppositions are defined visually as dialectical opposites which govern the performance. The stage

59 Gillian Beer, “The Island and the Aeroplane: the Case of Virginia Woolf”, Nation and Narration, ed. by Homi Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 266.
60 Frieder Stadtfeld notes the increasing proximity of epic and dramatic parts towards the end of the novel. “Virginia Woolfs letzter Roman: ‘more quintessential than the others’”, 63ff.
appears as a place between past, present, and future, between the singular vision of the individual and the timelessness of the view. The “Scenes from English History” not only interrupt the narrative flow of the novel and create an intermediary realm within the linear narration, but, in presenting fragments of history, they also refute the idea of chronological progression in the service of an overall teleological history. Indicative of the novel’s resistance to linear models, it is once again Lucy Swithin who interrupts the course of the play by her arrival: “But there was an interruption. ‘O,’ Miss La Trobe growled behind her tree, ‘the torture of these interruptions!’ ‘Sorry I’m so late,’ said Mrs. Swithin” (BA, 49).

The village pageant stages its own historicity in a metadramatic mode, and imitates the historical development of dramatic forms. Drawing on the medieval Mystery Plays, the prologue of the pageant underlines the effect of temporal remoteness in directing the audience’s attention to history made visible, emphasising what can and should be seen on stage. The archaic register used by the allegorised figure of England gives further emphasis to her appeal to the audience to willingly suspend their historical distance, and make two temporal levels overlap.

\[
\text{Come hither for our festival (she continued)}
\]
\[
\text{This is a pageant, all may see}
\]
\[
\text{Drawn from our island history}
\]
\[
\text{England am I. . . (BA, 47).}
\]

Although seeing is meant to equal believing in the theatrical illusion of historical distance, historical identity remains an illusion never to be achieved. The audience’s comments interrupt the words spoken on stage and constantly transport the reader back into the present of the narrative time of the novel. Time inverts itself in the interaction between the play and the audience, and what was foreground becomes background, and what is background rises to the surface. This movement between narrative time and the time of the narration once again takes up the analogy to the double plot in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* where during the performance of the mechanicals’ play at the court of Athens, Theseus, Hippolyta and the ‘lovers’ cannot refrain from intervening, and from destroying the efforts at creating theatrical illusion by their witticisms. This not only exasperates Peter Quince’s actors as it does Miss La Trobe, but also involves the reader/spectator as a third party to link the words of the play with the comments of the audience, and grants that despite its relative remoteness the action still has a bearing on the present.

In the pageant’s attempts at creating the illusion of historicity by using stereotypes, and catering to conventionalised expectations of the audience, the visibility of the performance marks the dissolution of historical time, and expresses
the dilemma that the present view can no longer capture the past. Theatrical illusion can neither be built up nor maintained, and the pageant is conspicuous by neither having a recognisable beginning nor a distinct ending. Instead, it starts and finishes with questions and observations by the narrator: “So it was the play then. Or was it the prologue?” (BA, 47); “Was that the end? The actors were reluctant to go. They lingered; they mingled” (BA, 121).

The scenes of the pageant are signatures of the temporality of aesthetic vision in that they provide a visual means to express that neither a sense of historical teleology nor the continuity of time can be regained. Aesthetic vision brings forth a temporality which resists received models of teleological progress. Moreover, the novel’s distinct temporality is incompatible with unifying or harmonising constructions of time. Rather than continuity, the scenes of the pageant emphasise discontinuity and non-identity, and, in doing so, they disclose the character of delusion inherent in any construction of seamless historical continuity.

Consequently, Miss La Trobe’s desperate struggle for a cathartic effect on the audience by communicating her vision fails: “Haven’t she, for twenty-five minutes, made them see? A vision imparted was relief from agony … for one moment … one moment. Then the music petered out on the last word we. […] She hadn’t made them see. It was a failure, another damned failure! As usual. Her vision escaped her” (BA, 61).

La Trobe relies on the impact of the theatre’s visuality to bring about insight. In her effort to “make them see, douche them with present time” (BA, 111) she is confronted by the dilemma of how to convey the present moment without making it realistic. She detects one of the shortcomings of her enterprise and believes that it was: “‘Reality too strong,’ she murmured” (BA, 111). Ironically, the sudden rainfall which literally grants her her wish, and which stops as unexpectedly as it came, presents an even stronger element of reality intervening into the course of the pageant: “Down it poured like all the people in the world weeping. Tears. Tears. Tears” (BA, 111). The anthropomorphic rain not only presents one of the many instances in the novel when nature takes over the course of events, and overcomes the division between mankind and nature, but it also answers the recurrent uncertainty about the weather, in uniting opposites and demonstrating that, in the end, it was both “wet and fine”.

3.4.2 The rhythm of vision in time

Other than planned by La Trobe, things in the pageant take their own course, and the repetition of “tears” not only emphasises the impact of the present as an elegiac moment of recognition, but it also corresponds to the novel’s expan-
sion of the moment by means of threefold repetitions: from the futility expressed by the beating of time of the dying butterfly: “beat, beat, beat” (BA, 9); “never, never, never” (BA, 10) to the central “Empty, empty, empty; silent, silent, silent” (BA, 22) of the room, and the “chuff, chuff, chuff”, and the “tick, tick, tick” of the machine during the pageant. The triadic sequences of these repetitions create a cyclical rhythm of musical time, which is present both in the inanimate machines and in nature, when for instance the swallows dance a waltz (BA, 113).

The ‘time-machine’ and the gramophone representing this rhythm are used to indicate the passing of time, and provide both continuity and a sense of unity between individual time and the collective time expressed in the pageant. Like the musical and the mechanical rhythm time produces momentary cohesion: “Time was passing. How long would time hold them together?” (BA, 94).

The threefold rhythm is used to overcome mutually exclusive alternatives. In bringing together the audience and the play, time as music also intensifies the characters’ vision, and contributes to a harmony between sight and sound: “Music wakes us. Music makes us see the hidden, join the broken. Look and listen” (BA, 75). The simultaneity of vision and sound is expressed when the scenery is perceived as a musical score in which swallows transform into notes and trees into bars:

Real swallows. Retreating and advancing. And the trees, O the trees, how gravely and sedately like senators in council, or the spaced pillars of some cathedral church. . . . Yes, they barred the music, and massed and hoarded; and prevented what was fluid from overflowing (BA, 113).

The view of the scenery in terms of a naturalised order creates a pictorial and musical equivalent to the paradox of motion and stasis, word and image, language and silence.

In the pageant, music in many ways is an organising principle and a means of providing continuity. At times when the visual impact of the play does not accomplish the consistency La Trobe desires, she turns to music as a last resort to bridge gaps, to simulate continuity, and to make the audience return to their seats, to watch and be silent: “Down came her hand peremptorily ‘Music, music,’ she signalled” (BA, 76).

Likewise, when theatrical illusion fails, and nothing can either be seen or heard on stage, nature, once again, takes up a part in the play. As an acoustic counterpart to the rain, the choric sounds of the cows contrast the present with the primeval, the mechanical with the natural, they endow the play with emotion, and provide a link between the scenes: “From cow after cow came the same yearning bellow. The whole world was filled with dumb yearning. It was the primeval voice sounding loud in the ear of the present moment. [...] The cows
annihilated the gap; bridged the distance; filled the emptiness and continued the emotion” (BA, 87). The course of the pageant, however, is mainly governed by inanimate and anonymous sounds. The gramophone generally determines the movement of the audience between the acts and preserves the continuity of the pageant: “Only the tick tick of the gramophone held them together” (BA, 95).

Formally, the term interval is used both in the dramatic and the musical sense. The first interval is introduced by the repeated chant of the gramophone “dispersed are we” (BA, 59/60). Until the audience eventually leaves their seats, the thoughts of the single characters rhythmically alternate with the “wailing” and “moaning” of the gramophone. Mrs. Manresa’s suggestion “‘Follow, follow, follow me. . . . Oh Mr. Parker, what a pleasure to see you here! I’m for tea’” (BA, 60) is followed by Isa’s reiterating the “Dispersed are we” (BA, 60). The rhyme contradicts the theme of dispersal, formally connects the individuals to each other, and paradoxically unites them in their collective dispersal.

When William Dodge wonders if he should “follow, follow, follow the dispersing company?”, the “dispersed are we” both interrupts his thoughts and links them to the rhythm of the music. Likewise, Cobbet of Cobbs Corner, who otherwise conceives of time according to the rhythm in which he waters his plants (BA, 68), uses a threefold rhythm when he asks himself about Miss La Trobe’s intentions, “‘What was in her mind, eh? What idea lay behind, eh? What made her indue the antique with this glamour – this sham lure, and set’ ‘em climbing, climbing, climbing up the monkey puzzle tree?’” (BA, 60). Once again, “monkey puzzle tree” rhymes with the succeeding “dispersed are we”. Each character thus contributes both to the dispersal, and to the “we” which holds the rhyme together and creates unity in disparity.

Whereas the other characters seem to be connected to the movement of the crowd and the ebb and flow of the music, Giles is exempt from it: “Giles remained like a stake in the tide of the flowing company” (BA, 60). His thoughts neither follow nor precede the “dispersed are we”. His motionless, isolated, and self-contained stance is expressed when the narrator produces the rhyme between “wood” and “stood”: “‘Follow?’ He kicked his chair back. ‘Whom? Where?’ He stubbed his light tennis shoes on the wood. ‘Nowhere. Anywhere.’ Stark still he stood” (BA, 60).

The repeated interventions of the gramophone present an element in a ritualised, mock-liturgical structure of the interval, in which the collective provides a response to the individual and conveys the sense of unity in disparity. The alternation of the rhythm is brought to a closure when Lucy Swithin bids her brother to depart from the scene with her: “‘Bart, my dear, come with me. . . . D’you remember, when we were children, the play we acted in the nursery?’” (BA, 60). Lucy’s “nursery” rhymes with “come with me”, but is not immediately followed
by a “dispersed are we”. Instead, her brother reminisces about their childhood. Unlike other members of the audience, who either follow the crowd, wonder about the play, or remain unsure about what to do at all, Lucy and Bartholomew both relate the play to their past when they compare it to their childhood games, and also to the future, when Bart acknowledges that for them “the game’s over” (BA, 60). Their distancing themselves from the scene is given further emphasis by the presence of the reporter who notes down their names. Mr. Page, whose name alludes both to a servant and the printed page of a newspaper documenting the present, creates a fleeting sense of the present as being already the past.

The paradoxical union in disparity between forward and backward movement in time is reflected in the ways in which sentences of different meaning resonate with each other in rhythm, and the narrative takes on the rhythm of poetry. The progression of time, which Isa describes as an endless, enduring, interchangeable, and possibly futile course is ‘echoed’ by Mr. Oliver’s repetition of the nursery rhyme:

‘This year, last year, next year, never,’ Isa murmured.
‘Tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor,’ Bartholomew echoed (BA, 135).

The rhythm of the nursery rhyme entwines narrative progression and temporal regress, and the passage transports Isa forwards to an endless future and Oliver backwards to childhood. The tripartite rhythm of repetitions and phrases in Between the Acts is expressive of the simultaneous presence of a tripartite structure of temporality.

For Lucy and Bartholomew, the end of the novel suggests both the idea of return and of continuation: Lucy returns to her book: “It was time to read now, her Outline of History. But she had lost her place. She turned the pages looking at pictures – mammoths, mastodons, prehistoric birds. Then she found the page where she had stopped” (BA, 135). For Lucy, the temporal gap created in the second half of the novel by the performance is recast as merely an interruption in her reading. In her final appearance in the novel, she finishes a chapter “quickly, guiltily, like a child who will be told to go to bed before the end of the chapter” (BA, 135). The end of the chapter in the outline of history again suggests both a backward movement into prehistory, and a forward movement in the process of reading.

At the end, the hope invested into music and rhythm only temporarily relieves La Trobe’s anxiety and eventually does not succeed in creating unity. Neither do the nursery rhymes appease the uneasiness of the audience, who, before the pageant turns to its final scene “the present time. Ourselves”, is made to endure a time of waiting for the end. The dramatic display of the present, in which the audience finds itself “in limbo”, in a temporal vacuum between past
and present, is emphasised by the absence of music, and the inexorable ticking of the time-machine:

All their nerves were on edge. They sat exposed. The machine ticked. There was no music. The horns of cars on the high road were heard. And the swish of trees. They were neither one thing nor the other; neither Victorians nor themselves. They were suspended, without being, in limbo. Tick, tick, tick went the machine (BA, 110).

Rather than with the expected “Grand Ensemble, round the Union Jack” (BA, 98), the play ends on the “distorting and upsetting and utterly unfair” (BA, 114) ensemble of the audience reflected by the fragments of glass: “And the audience saw themselves, not whole by any means, but at any rate sitting still” (BA, 115).

The view repeated in its own way what the tune was saying. The sun was sinking; the colours were merging; and the view was saying how after toil men rest from their labours; how coolness comes; reason prevails; and having unharnessed the team from the plough, neighbours dig in cottage gardens and lean over cottage gates. The cows, making a step forward, then standing still, were saying the same thing to perfection. Folded in this triple melody, the audience sat gazing (BA, 83–84).

Sight and sound merge into the general dissonant uproar when the sounds of cows and dogs provide a background for the audience’s reaction towards their fleeting images, which are finally completed by the actors appearing on stage. The visual impact of the mirrors creates the present as an orchestration of fragments of presence, and is further sustained by the temporary ending of time, which recalls the image of the watch in the glass case from the beginning of the novel: “The hands of the clock had stopped at the present moment. It was now. Ourselves” (BA, 115).

The division between actors and audience, between present and past is visualised as the wall of civilisation, which is addressed in similar terms as the wall that tragically separates the lovers Pyramus and Thisbe in A Midsummer Night’s Dream: “Look at ourselves, ladies and gentlemen! Then at the wall; and ask how’s this wall, the great wall, which we call, perhaps miscall, civilization, to be built by (here the mirrors flicked and flashed) orts, scraps and fragments like ourselves?” (BA, 116).

Suggesting separation and unity at the same time, the wall, made out of scraps and fragments, prepares for a gradual building up of cohesion among the audience. After the momentary suspension of time, the fragments are recombined and re-arranged into a kaleidoscopic whole at the sound of three notes following one another: “Like quicksilver sliding, filings magnetized, the distracted united. The tune began; the first note meant a second; the second a third” (BA, 117).
When the audience is about to leave, the anonymous voice of the loudspeaker asking for contemplation and self-recognition provides a further contraction of time for the audience when it looks at itself in the mirrors. Time is dissociated from rhythm and condensed into minimal units of words: “before we go . . . (Those who had risen sat down) . . . let’s talk in words of one syllable, without larding, stuffing or cant. Let’s break the rhythm and forget the rhyme. And calmly consider ourselves” (BA, 115).

The passage refers back to an earlier one in the novel where an unidentifiable voice is heard practicing scales in which words of one syllable consisting of three letters are the origins out of which phrases and songs can be composed: “the separate letters formed one word ‘Dog’. Then a phrase. It was a simple tune, another voice speaking” (BA, 73). The rhythm of musical time is finally broken, when the sound of the gramophone subsides and leaves it open whether unity or dispersal will prevail: “The gramophone gurgled Unity – Dispersity. It gurgled Un . . . dis . . . And ceased” (BA, 124).

After the play, the sound of church bells takes over and ends the rhythm of the gramophone, and for Isa the silence in the absence of another note is paralleled by the change of the stage back into being a spot of grass:

The church bells always stopped, leaving you to ask: Won't there be another note? Isa, half-way across the lawn, listened. . . . Ding, dong, ding . . . There was not going to be another note. The congregation was assembled, on their knees, in the church. The service was beginning. The play was over; swallows skimmed the grass that had been the stage (BA, 128).

Corresponding to the triadic sequences of rhythm, the novel develops its temporality within a triadic structure between past, present, and future, in which the paradox of binary oppositions gives rise to a third element, between the oppositions of language and silence, between word and image, and between love and hate.

The threefold structure of repetitions is sustained by the use of monosyllabic, three letter-words, nursery rhymes, scales and wordplays on “cat”, “A.B.C.” (BA, 71), and “Isa”. The novel’s recurrent pattern of three elements and the number three is most closely linked to Isa’s character. Isa is thirty-nine years old, and in the first scene of the novel she finds herself on a three-cornered chair (BA, 2), and later faces a three-folded mirror (BA, 7). In her initial description, her pigtails and the faded dressing-gown are mentioned three times (BA, 2), and the beginning of the novel marks the third time she meets Haines (BA, 2). When the play, which keeps ‘running’ in Isa’s head (BA, 70), makes her wonder about its meaning, she finds that it does not tell her anything she did not know already and analytically starts thinking in dualisms:
Did the plot matter? She shifted and looked over her right shoulder. The plot was only there to beget emotion. There were only two emotions: love; and hate. There was no need to puzzle out the plot. Perhaps Miss La Trobe meant that when she cut this knot in the centre? Don't bother about the plot: the plot's nothing (BA, 56).

Nevertheless, Isa cannot entirely escape from the play. When she tries to break away from the plot which, apart from being “nothing” to her is mere “verbiage, repetition” (BA, 57), she is incapable of doing so. Her silent interruption of a love scene is not only itself a repetition, but casts herself into the role of an actress, when it echoes a line from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in which Egeus' interrupts and silences Lysander's attempt at an explanation: 61 “It was enough. Enough. Enough” (BA, 57).

When the death of an old woman on stage is shown, Isa wishes to take her place and becomes aware of the third element superseding love and hate: “She fell back lifeless. The crowd drew away. Peace, let her pass. She to whom all's one now, summer or winter. Peace was the third emotion. Love. Hate. Peace. Three emotions made the ply of human life” (BA, 57). Isa's thoughts about death, and her desire for time to have a stop is expressed when in reflecting her life, she restates the last line from *The Waves*, “The waves broke on the shore” (W, 199), which marks the death of Bernard: “'Dispersed are we,' Isabella followed her, humming. 'All is over. The wave has broken. Left us stranded, high and dry. Single, separate on the shingle. Broken is the three-fold ply …'” (BA, 60). After the pageant, Isa who only remembers “orts, scraps and fragments” (BA, 133) from it, becomes aware of her own isolation, and can no longer connect the three emotions creating the “ply of human life”.

Like the mechanicals' play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Miss La Trobe's pageant does not have an epilogue. Instead, her contemplating another play at the end of the day can be read as an epilogue to *Between the Acts*, one which, however, is incapable of producing an ending. In a state similar to that described by Puck in his final appeal to the audience: “If we shadows have offended, /Think but this, and all is mended:/ That you have but slumbered here/ while these visions did appear” (MND 5.1. 402–405), for La Trobe words and visions rise to the surface of her mind: “Then something rose to the surface. 'I should group them,' she murmured, 'here.' It would be midnight; there would be two figures, half concealed by a rock. The curtain would rise. What would the first words be? The words escaped her” (BA, 130).

The scene she composes prefigures the last scene of the novel, and provides it with a second, if open ending, when Isa and Giles are alone, and inadvertently

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61 Egeus: “Enough, enough, my lord; you have enough – ” (MND, 4. 1. 154).
become actors in the yet unwritten play. Unlike the words she has used in the pageant, unconventional language, words which are not merely descriptive, taken from literary sources, or indicative of historical evidence, gain importance for her: “Words without meaning – wonderful words” (BA, 131). Rather than a horizontal linearity, these words provide a vertical model of time rising to the surface of the characters’ minds (BA, 53) in the here and now. The verticality of time which has been symbolically present in the lily pond is individualised when the water world of the lily pond and its mud illustrate La Trobe’s creative process. Like the mysterious pond with its “black cushion of mud” (BA, 26) the “fertile mud” of La Trobe’s imagination makes words rise to the surface (BA, 131). Half-conscious and no longer seeing clearly, she imagines the time, place and characters of a scene, and, after an interruption caused by the starlings settling on a tree,62 she is able to hear their words:

The cheap clock ticked; smoke obscured the pictures. [...] She no longer saw them, yet they upheld her, sitting arms akimbo with her glass before her. There was the high ground at midnight; there the rock; and two scarcely perceptible figures. Suddenly the tree was pelted with starlings. She set down her glass. She heard the first words (BA, 131).

Similar to “The Moment: Summer’s Night”, at the end of Between the Acts, aesthetic vision takes place in-between the extremes at the moment when visual perception is about to fade in the dusk. La Trobe only gains her aesthetic vision of a play to come when she loses sight of her surroundings, and when she is able to depart from historical reference: “There was no longer a view – no Folly, no spire of Bolney Minster. It was land merely, no land in particular. She put down her case and stood looking at the land. Then something rose to the surface” (BA, 130).

In the twilight Isa likewise looks out of the window at the scenery disappearing from sight, and the pageant disappearing from her memory: “she watched the pageant fade. The flowers flashed before they faded. She watched them flash” (BA, 134). She longs for a release from her dilemma of being caught in-between two emotions by a future La Trobe appearing out of the bushes: “Love and hate – how they tore her asunder! Surely it was time someone invented a new plot, or that the author came out from the bushes...” (BA, 134).

62 The image of starlings prompting artistic vision is likewise used in To the Lighthouse: “All of this danced up and down, like a company of gnats, each separate, but all marvelously controlled in an invisible elastic net – danced up and down in Lily’s mind, in and about the branches of the pear tree, where still hung in effigy the scrubbed kitchen table, symbol of her profound respect for Mr. Ramsay’s mind, until her thought which had spun quicker and quicker exploded of its own intensity; she felt released; a shot went off close at hand, and there came, flying from its fragments, frightened, effusive, tumultuous, a flock of starlings” (TL, 25).
In her relation with Giles, Isa, who previously “had not spoken to him, not one word. Nor looked at him either” (BA, 69), is granted her wish, when, at the end of the novel, both of them obtain the opportunity to act their hitherto “unacted parts” (BA, 95, 121, 128). The last scene of the novel balances its main opposition between language and silence, man and woman, when word and image fall into one in the final sentence: “Then the curtain rose, they spoke” (BA, 136). In the creation of this new play, however, also a new audience is constituted: the reader, and the future, which Isa had claimed for her generation is not suspended, but postponed into the future of the respective “now” created in the present of reading.

The remaining third element in a paradox, exceeding love and hate, which Isa longs for, and which in the narrative present of Between the Acts might be peace, is transferred to a future beyond the time of the novel. Unlike T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land”, which gestures towards a more reconciliatory ending in its threefold repetition of “shantih”, “the peace which passeth understanding”, Between the Acts does not offer a final resolution, and abstains from prophesying a peaceful future.